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The Falklands and the War of Reagan's Ear

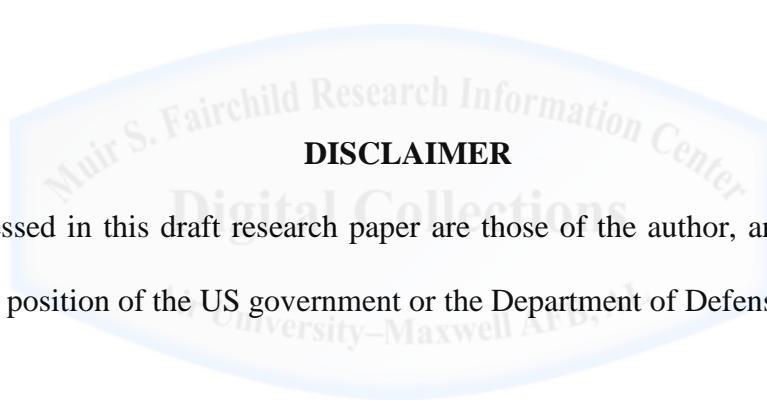
by

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The Falklands and the War of Reagan's Ear

During the Cold War, the UK rebalanced its defense posture emphasizing a continental commitment to NATO over its former maritime strategy. Successive defense reviews whittled away the reach and capacity of the Royal Navy, and by 1982 the poverty of options available led it to employ a tripwire strategy of deterrence in the South Atlantic that, instead, precipitated an invasion of the Falkland Islands. Nevertheless, Argentina's actions caught the UK by surprise and threatened Parliament's confidence in the sitting government; Admiral Henry Leach's warning to Prime Minister (PM) Margaret Thatcher¹ that in another few months 'we might be living in another country', has gained mythical status in the retelling of the crisis. Yet underpinning his emotional rhetoric, he understood that a naval task force could deploy at short notice and engage in military posturing at a pace that ensured diplomacy could be exhausted and, hopefully, the Americans brought onside; in garnering support, Thatcher might be less isolated in Parliament. Despite diplomatic efforts, the UK waged a brief, bloody campaign against a regional power that possessed advanced weapon systems, sustaining heavy naval losses. Each successful Argentine attack eliminated whole units from warfighting and attracted casualty rates that accrued faster than those of subsequent ground operations. When Argentina surrendered its forces after 100 days, military casualties had exceeded the number of Falklanders on whose behalf the conflict had been fought. Argentina lost over one-half of all its military aircraft, and a similar scale of damage was inflicted upon the frigates and destroyers of the task force battle group; just enough was left of the task force to recapture the Islands. The conflict's origins, execution and consequences are explored, and contemporary strategic and doctrinal recommendations proposed.

Strategy versus Commitment: The Falkland Islands lie at the eastern mouth of the Straits of Magellan comprising two main islands, separated by Falkland Sound. Some 800 miles to the east is South Georgia and 500 miles beyond this, the South Sandwich Islands; at the time these were dependents of the Falkland Islands.² Neither the South Sandwich Islands nor South Georgia have had permanent settlers, whereas the population of the Falkland Islands, centered in Port Stanley on East Falkland, had declined from a peak of 3,000 in 1931 to approximately 1,800 by 1980, and was estimated to decline further.³ At the time of the conflict, there were 30 Argentine citizens, similar numbers of Chilean and American citizens, with the remainder being of British descent.

Both Argentinean and British governments sought to justify a claim to sovereignty over the Falkland Islands on the basis of chronology, conflict, and treaties. However, in 1810 the United Provinces of Rio del Plato (later Argentina) rejected Spanish colonial rule and claimed, by inheritance, all the territorial rights previously claimed by Spain, including the Falkland Islands. It is this right of inheritance, along with the geographical contiguity of the ocean shelf, which formed the basis for Argentina's claim. Britain, instead, has argued that its own permanent settlement of the Falkland Islands since 1833 has perfected its title through a process known as usucaption and referred to in international law as prescriptive acquisition, thereby potentially rendering Argentina's claim at risk of being diminished by the passage of time. In addition to usucaption, UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 has been invoked by the Islanders to articulate their own self determination to remain part of the United Kingdom.^{4,5}

Between the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Spain, Argentina, and the United States all engaged in military exchanges over the Falkland Islands. Britain, over time, had attempted to annex the Antarctic region by exploration in the hope that economic and military

opportunities might open up on this last continent. After the Second World War, the view persisted in London that the Falkland Islands were Britain's card of entry into the Antarctic region, and the key to two oceans should the Panama Canal be blockaded; Britain's military strength allowed its leaders to adopt a unilateral position.⁶ In 1951, Argentine forces occupied adjacent British territory in the Antarctic Peninsula and opened fire on a scientific party from the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). Churchill ordered a nearby RN frigate, HMS *Burghead Bay* to escort and land the scientific party and subdue the occupiers; the incident catalyzed diplomacy that resulted in agreement to an Antarctic Treaty in 1959, and a decision by London to send a naval party of Royal Marines to Port Stanley who could be dispatched, by RN icebreaker, to act as territorial constabulary.⁷ With the Antarctic Treaty having set aside the issue of Antarctic territorial claims for the foreseeable future, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) now assessed that the value of trade with the Argentine government far exceeded the benefits accruing from the UK holding onto the Islands.⁸ However, the majority of land on the Falklands was at this time still owned by UK-based absentee landlords who employed tenant farmers who had no wish to change the status quo by transferring sovereignty, since their landowning status might be uncertain following negotiations.^{9,10}

In 1967, UN Resolution 2065 called upon the UK and Argentina to resolve the dispute over sovereignty in negotiations having regard to 'the interests of the population of the Falkland Islanders'.¹¹ In distinguishing between negotiating on the basis of interests, rather than wishes, the FCO was not able to insist to the Argentineans that Islanders be included in negotiations, yet any solution still required a compromise from the Islanders. When, in 1968, it was discovered that the FCO had begun secret negotiations to transfer the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands to Argentina, agitated landowners had questions tabled in Parliament.¹² In the House of Commons,

Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart received a hostile reception from MP's who demanded parliamentary vigilance to ensure that British citizens were not sold down the river by the FCO. Stewart was castigated for refusing an undertaking that no further negotiations took place, but was forced to accede to a commitment that the 'Falkland Islanders wishes would be paramount.'¹³ Stewart's words committed all future governments to negotiate a conflicted position, and the Falklands issue subtly changed from being a foreign policy problem to a domestic issue; in that any resolution lay decisively in Parliament, and no longer with the FCO.

Tripwire Deterrence: The UK's position on the Falklands issue was later described by the Under-Secretary of State for the Foreign Office, Henry Hankey, as "A noble ideal, and a chorus in Parliament in support of a commitment that successive British governments were never quite willing to pay for."¹⁴ Although the FCO continued negotiations with Argentina, progress was limited to economic cooperation rather than sovereignty and this led to increasing frustration in Buenos Aries. In 1971, the UK government commissioned a geological report to ascertain the extent of economic opportunities. The resulting Griffith Report was published in 1974 at the height of the OPEC crisis which quadrupled the price of crude oil; Griffith's report indicated that the Falklands Basin in the Scotia Sea was replete with oil.¹⁵ British PM James Callaghan offered Argentina a Memorandum of Understanding to explore for oil, but this was discounted when the Argentine Navy attempted to intercept the Royal Survey Ship *Shackleton* in international waters. When RSS *Shackleton* refused a boarding party, it was fired upon, breaching its hull. At this time, the RN also detected evidence of Argentine military landings on South Georgia and observed a clandestine Argentine military facility on the South Sandwich Islands. Oscar Montes, the Argentine Foreign Minister, suggested to UK Ambassador, David Ashe, that he 'turn a blind

eye' to Argentine activities in the Dependencies, but Ashe replied that any exacerbation '...would lead to a military response'.¹⁶

The reality for Britain in 1974 was that a further defense review had led to stringent cuts and the UK was also falling into an economic crisis that by 1976 required it to borrow from the International Monetary Fund. Rather than war, Britain needed to explore economic opportunities such as oil exploration in the Falkland Basin, since these might be feasible if undertaken jointly with Argentina. Instead, by 1977, a UK Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) assessment concluded that further deadlock on sovereignty negotiations 'would lead to Argentine action against British shipping in the disputed waters'.¹⁷ In response, frigates HMS *Phoebe* and *Alacrity*, fleet auxiliaries RFA *Olwen* and *Resurgent* and the nuclear submarine (SSN) HMS *Dreadnought* were dispatched to the South Atlantic. Given that there was little deterrent effect in keeping their deployment secret, but mindful of scuppering ongoing FCO negotiations, then PM James Callaghan, secretly approached 'C', Head of MI6, asking that he mention news of the deployment to his American colleagues, the assumption being that it would be leaked to the Argentine Secretaría de Inteligencia.¹⁸ It was later confirmed that Admiral Jorge Anaya; Fleet Commander of the Argentine Navy, met with Admiral Juan Lombardo; head of the Argentine submarine flotilla, to discuss the deployment of the RN SSN in particular. Lombardo confirmed that newly-acquired German-built Argentinean diesel submarines (SSK) (Type 209) were not able to locate and attack a British SSN, and this scuttled any further planning for an Argentinean naval incursion.¹⁹

If 1968 had been the year in which everything changed for UK policy towards the Falklands, then 1978 was the year in which Argentine strategy changed. Argentina saw itself as having three neighbors, Brazil, Chile and the UK; in that order. Argentina had territorial

disputes with all three countries and had threatened Chile over rights to access the Beagle Channel. Based on historical precedent, the UN appointed the UK to chair international arbitration on the Beagle Channel dispute issue through a panel of European powers and the US. In what was to become known as the ‘Queens Award’ the decision of the panel went in favor of Chile; with Argentina arguing that the UK had delivered a national insult.²⁰ Shortly afterwards, a new government in Brazil reached agreement with Argentina over their territorial claim and this resolution effectively elevated the Falklands Islands dispute within Argentina, at a time when the last RN large deck carrier, HMS *Ark Royal*, was being paid off, leaving only the light carrier HMS *Hermes* and later, the smaller HMS *Invincible*.

Despite the success of the 1977 naval deployment to the South Atlantic, deploying an SSN left little in the way of a flexible response to what may have been be a gradual Argentine escalation. Admiral Harry Train II USN expressed the view that “a submarine is a lousy peacetime naval presence vehicle. It is not an effective means to influence events.”^{21,22} But by this time UK Ministerial thinking, expressed through successive defense reviews, sought to remove itself from what it termed ‘Out of Area’ commitments i.e. non NATO. It saw the role of the RN as being indivisible from NATO Article 4 and so there was a new emphasis on Mine Counter-Measures (MCM) and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) in the North Sea and the eastern North Atlantic.²³ There was to be a greater reliance on submarines and little need for RN carriers, aside from conducting ASW work and supporting amphibious landings in Norway; the USN undertook to maintain maritime superiority through the Striking Fleet Atlantic carrier force. By 1979, John Nott, UK Defense Secretary, had emphasized the importance of submarines in his acquisition programme, insisting that any RN surface force ‘would stand little chance of survival against the stand-off missiles of the Soviet Backfire bombers.’²⁴ However, although it is correct

to argue that to be a major maritime power a nation must possess sufficient numbers of attack submarines to constitute a deterrent to conflict, in order to influence events prior to conflict, then any deterrent force must be detected by an opponent i.e. a fleet in being. Train argued that ‘People don’t understand them (submarines), they (politicians) don’t understand how they will relate to a series of events they have in mind. They can push you past the threshold of war.’²⁵ Admiral Lord Terry Lewin RN; then Chief of the Naval Staff, concurred with Train, adding that any balance between surface and submarine was ‘a perennial argument’ and that ‘in peacetime, and in the run up to war, surface ships are very much more use. However, if you get as far as war itself, submarines are of much more use than surface ships.’²⁶ The nub of the argument against Nott’s conclusion is that standing peace-time tasking will place an emphasis on deterrence and the deployment of surface ships to undertake joint exercises and execute defense diplomacy. Lord Lewin commented that ‘to meet the political commitments successive governments have placed upon us in peacetime, always requires us to have more surface ships than we actually possess.’²⁷ For the UK, not only was the question of force-balance a vexed one in the event of an Out of Area incident, realistically only the submarine fleet could deploy at short notice and remain on station without the RN falling foul of extant NATO and bi-lateral commitments.

The paucity of options induced by earlier decision-making increasingly limited the UK’s ability to influence events and to respond by any other means than military bluff; at this juncture it is difficult to envisage circumstances in which Parliament will agree to the SSN attacking Armada Republica Argentina (ARA) vessels. Diplomatically, the UN Committee of 24 on Decolonization was exerting pressure on the UK to seek a negotiated settlement with Argentina, and soundings between FCO staffs and their counterparts in Latin & South America led to the

conclusion that there was little support for the UK position in either the Organization of American States (OAS) or UN forums.²⁸ Concurrently, the US was increasingly committed to Argentina, which it saw as being a buttress to the spread of communism.²⁹ The lack of diplomatic leverage necessarily placed a disproportionate premium on the abilities of, and relations available to, the UK Ambassador in Buenos Aires.

Intelligence assets in Argentina were limited to UK and US diplomatic reporting. At this time, no overhead assets were in range and signals intelligence gathering facilities on the South Atlantic ridge were focused on monitoring Rhodesia as it transitioned to independence.³⁰ The lack of intelligence assets placed further emphasis on the ability of diplomatic reporting to identify early any Argentine escalation.

Militarily, contingency plans to reinforce the Falkland Islands had relied upon the ability to airlift troops to Chile, Uruguay or Brazil, from where they could reinforce the islands by sea within six days. This assumption was now unrealistic, and with Wide-awake airfield on Ascension Island still 3,385 miles away, all contingency plans to reinforce the Falklands by air were curtailed; a runway was completed at Port Stanley in 1979, but it could not support an airlift. Positioning combat aircraft to reinforce the Islands was equally difficult. Even if HMS *Hermes* was to deploy to the Falkland Islands in order to disembark Harriers to operate from tactical landing sites, insufficient logistics capacity existed on the Islands to sustain their operations. Seaborne reinforcement was more practicable, but assets from the NATO area would not arrive for three weeks and in the absence of signals intelligence and satellite imaging there would be insufficient warning of an Argentinean military escalation; news of a RN deployment might even precipitate an escalation. Once in the South Atlantic, any standing deterrent force required three ships to be committed for each ship on station, plus fleet auxiliaries

in support; not enough ships remained in the RN to undertake both this task and meet commitments. Therefore, preemptive reinforcement of the Falkland Islands was not feasible, and beyond existing ad-hoc naval deterrence, options for recapture required both control of the sea & air superiority to enable an amphibious landing.

There were further difficulties. Economically, the Falkland Islanders had long been dependent upon Argentina for the supply of the majority of its fuels, commodities and communications, including the only air link to a mainland. It was feasible for the UK to set up maritime lines of supply and communication, but this was very costly and this undermined a position whereby far more tax was paid by the Islanders than HM Treasury spent on the Islands, vital to sustaining popular Parliamentary support for their cause.

By the late 1970s, the UK had seen its economy overtaken by West Germany and Japan and this, in part, had been attributed to the UK having to spend in excess of 10% of GDP on defense.³¹ To maintain the defense commitment, there was renewed emphasis on off-setting costs by increasing defense exports including; ironically, seeking Argentine orders for the new Type 22 ASW frigate.³² Nevertheless, despite the Argentinean government having strong economic cards to play in negotiations over sovereignty, what was absent was the political will of successive British governments to make clear to both the Islanders and the public, the true costs of the interdependent but unsustainable negotiating positions on Falkland Islands sovereignty.

By 1979, the incoming Thatcher government had been bequeathed the issue of an archipelago some 8,000 miles distant from the homeland with a dwindling population and diminishing economic fortunes. These islands relied upon a neighboring country for communications and logistical means, but, unfortunately, this same country claimed sovereignty

over them. Distance from the homeland, lack of both airstrip capacity and host nation support from nearby neighbors, as well as extant commitments to NATO, had rendered preemptive defense of the islands infeasible and prohibitively expensive, whereas recapture involved a major naval operation. The continuing lack of resolution on the sovereignty issue undermined the UK within the UN and yet, Parliament allowed the Islander's wishes to remain paramount; conversely, solutions identified by the FCO that were acceptable to Argentina were unacceptable to the Islanders and Parliament in turn. The FCO might have been congratulated for sustaining a diplomatic impasse for more than a decade, but events in 1981 gave impetus to a further hardening of attitudes by both the Falkland Islanders and the Argentineans.

The UK's Nationality Bill was announced in 1981, and applied to all British Overseas Territories, threatening to remove the right of abode in the UK for the one third of the Falkland Islanders that were not native British.³³ Soon afterwards, the Nott Review announced plans to scrap the remaining RN icebreaker *Endurance* at the end of the 1981 patrol season.³⁴ News of the Nationality Bill hardened the resolve of the Islanders to resist any transfer of sovereignty, whereas the announcement of the withdrawal of HMS *Endurance*, against Admiralty advice, risked signaling British withdrawal from the Overseas Territories.

Argentina was by now facing difficulties of its own. The Argentine military had seized power in a 1976 coup in order to combat a wave of violence instigated by domestic extremists following the death of President Juan Peron. As part of its National Reorganization Process, the military formed a committee, a Junta, which by 1981 was facing increasing opposition over its human rights record, and mounting allegations of corruption. To allay domestic criticism of its policies, the military Junta instigated a popular campaign to regain the Falkland Islands. Nicanor Costa Mendez, then Foreign Minister for Argentina, later confirmed that their own analysis of

the 1981 UK Defense White Paper and the subsequent Nott Review had a ‘seductive significance’ in Buenos Aires and that ‘as they were going to reduce the role of the Royal Navy’s surface fleet, it made it less likely that Britain would prove to be a determined opponent over the Falklands. The Royal Navy was to be concentrated on submarines.’³⁵ Such a conclusion also risked lowering Argentine diplomatic concern about the consequences of the Junta escalating the threat of military action, should sovereignty negotiations remained in deadlock.

Operation ROSARIO: Late in 1981, the JIC concluded that there was a ‘strong likelihood of military action’ and possibly ‘in the second half of 1982.’³⁶ At that time, diplomatic relations with the new military Junta were being established, so London’s ability to influence events in Buenos Aires had declined to the point where it had lost the diplomatic initiative. Any void in communications with Argentina risked being filled by hyperbole in the national press; this was to become apparent as events unravelled. On 20 March, 1982, London was informed that a party of Argentines had landed illegally on South Georgia. Following diplomatic protest to Buenos Aires, some in the party were removed the next day, but BAS suspected armed naval personnel remained. On 23 March, Conservative backbenchers and Labour MPs in Parliament threatened a major problem ‘if she doesn’t get the Argentines out by next week.’³⁷ Without prior consultation with the UK Ambassador in Buenos Aires, Foreign Office Minister Richard Luce announced that *Endurance* would embark a naval party of Royal Marines and ensure the removal of the Argentines. In response to newspaper reports of the intended expulsion unbeknown to London, the military Junta ordered the fleet auxiliary *Bahai Buen Suceso* to sail to South Georgia to protect the Argentine landing party, while two missile corvettes, the ARA *Drummond* and *Granville*, sailed west to position themselves between the Falklands and South Georgia. Costa

Mendez later confirmed that during a meeting with the Junta, on 23 March, contingency plans to land an amphibious force on the Falklands were brought forward.³⁸ Fleet Commander of the Argentine Navy and one of the military Junta, Admiral Jorge Anaya confirmed in a de-briefing to Train, that the Junta's assessment was that since the US had failed to support the UK during the Suez crisis in 1956, it was assumed that they would stay neutral.³⁹ Anaya clarified that the decision to invade, what Train referred to as the 'war starter', was a BBC announcement that an SSN had deployed to the South Atlantic from Gibraltar.⁴⁰ Operation ROSARIO, an Argentine amphibious operation to capture Port Stanley was originally planned to be executed during the southern hemisphere summer; November to March. However, Anaya persuaded the Junta to act immediately, believing that they only had the window of time afforded by the SSN's journey south because "after that it would be like the 70s."⁴¹ The decision to execute Operation ROSARIO was given within two hours of the announcement by the BBC. Although Costa Mendez was strictly not part of the military Junta, Anaya subsequently persuaded him that landing the troops was only 'giving diplomacy a nudge.'⁴² Costa Mendez, informed by his own analysis of the Nott Review and the Suez crisis agreed that the US and the UN would again act as a restraint against any military response from Britain.⁴³ At this time, both the JIC and CIA Daily Intelligence Summaries of Monday 29 March noted the incident in South Georgia, but discounted armed action in the next 3 to 6-months. Operation ROSARIO, the Argentine capture of the Falklands Islands, was completed Friday 2 April.

Geopolitical Context: Those countries that were adjacent to Argentina i.e. Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil and Chile, had most to fear if Argentina's actions in seizing the Islands by force

were sustained by diplomacy. The Junta might be encouraged to again use force to further other territorial ambitions.

Elsewhere in the OAS, support was more positive and ideological, favoring Argentina righting an old wrong. America's position was more conflicted. International law was clear, whatever the origins of the dispute, but failure of negotiation followed by the use of force to seize territory could not stand as an outcome. Whereas the initial British occupation of the Islands was not deemed a violation of the Monroe Doctrine, the US was far more concerned about the spread of Soviet influenced Leninist-Marxist communism across central and Latin America; openly siding with the UK against Argentina could serve as grist to the mill of the communists wishing to highlight America favoring the old world over the OAS countries. After 2 April, Argentineans, the FCO, anglophiles, anglophobes, pro-Atlanticists and supporters of the OAS all waged a 'war for Reagan's ear'⁴⁴ For those supporting the invasion, America's willingness to listen contrasted with London, where an effective Falkland Islands lobby had drowned out opposing voices for decades. America also had to contend with British political ire left over from the Suez crisis which had continued to play a role in UK-US relations; in the 1960s PM Harold Wilson refused to support President Lyndon B. Johnson in Vietnam, and PM Edward Heath later refused the US permission to use facilities in the UK to provide support during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and also denied the US access to SIGINT facilities in the Cyprus sovereign base areas.

While the UK's interests in Latin America were by now damaged, they were largely insignificant to it, whereas the opposite was true for the US. The Falklands crisis risked damaging either US relations with the OAS and hastening the spread of Soviet inspired

communism in the Americas, or relations with the NATO alliance and encouraging Soviet hegemony in Europe.

During the course of ensuing diplomacy, Argentina helped make America's choice for it. Resolution 502 in the United Nations was sponsored by the UK and called for the immediate withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands. During debate in session, the Argentinean representative asserted that UN Article 2 only applied to claims post-1945. This statement angered representatives of a number of Arab & African members present, because it undermined their nation's claim for sovereign equality.⁴⁵ As a result, Resolution 502 was unexpectedly passed. Later, during US mediated peace negotiations, the Junta refused to accept a proposal from Thatcher which saw Britain forego any claim to sovereignty, instead placing the Islander's self-determination as being paramount. This led to the 'Reagan tilt' during a meeting of the US National Security Council on 30 April, and the provision of US logistical and intelligence support to the task force.⁴⁶ General Vernon Walters attended the meeting and commented that 'not only had Thatcher declared her minimum line, it was sustainable in law and having been forced to decide between the OAS and NATO, we decided on the basis of the importance of the deterrent.'^{47,48}

Operation CORPORATE: On 2 April, Admiral Leach advised Thatcher that "I can put together a Task Force...it can be ready to leave in forty eight hours."⁴⁹ Parliament announced the sailing of the Task Force on 3 April, and identified four objectives for the recapture of the Falklands Islands as part of Operation CORPORATE:⁵⁰

1. Establish a sea blockade around the islands.
2. Recapture South Georgia. (Operation PARAQUET)
3. Gain sea and air supremacy around the Falklands.
4. Amphibious landing and recapture the Falkland Islands. (Operation SUTTON)

Rear Admiral Sandy Woodward was selected to lead the naval task force. Woodward planned his campaign in reverse because the Islands needed to be recaptured before the onset of the Antarctic winter, and the estimated duration of the ground campaign determined the latest date by which he had to undertake Operation SUTTON. In turn, this enabled him to estimate the last date by which control of the air must be achieved over the Islands etc; these calculations engendered an expedient aggression that particularly characterized the naval campaign. Woodward first sailed to Ascension Island in the mid-Atlantic to assemble his battle group of 27 ships. The initial objective was to establish a sea blockade; however, in international law the term blockade is closely associated with a state of declared war. In order to provide an adequate warning of potential danger to vessels in the South Atlantic, a Maritime Exclusion Zone (MEZ) would be announced and patrolled by SSN. The battle group was to recapture South Georgia and achieve sea and air superiority around the Falkland Islands. Following behind the battle group was a flotilla of Royal Fleet Auxiliary and troop ships whose complements were to cross-deck personnel and equipment at sea for transfer to the amphibious landing vessels that would undertake Operation SUTTON. Finally, a convoy of merchant ships carrying more troops and supplies would position to the rear with the intention of re-occupying and defending the Islands against Argentine counter attack. Including Woodward's battle group, the RN committed 124 ships to the campaign. CINC Fleet, under his separate chain of command, dispatched SSNs

HMS *Splendid*, HMS *Spartan* and HMS *Conqueror* to the South Atlantic and following their arrival on 12 April, the UK declared a 200-mile MEZ made more effective since the Island's airfield remained too short to receive the larger Argentine cargo aircraft.⁵¹

Operation PARAQUET commenced on 20 April when SSN HMS *Conqueror* arrived off South Georgia to undertake reconnaissance; extreme weather hampered initial attempts to retake the Island, as did the presence of the diesel attack submarine ARA *Santa Fe*. *Santa Fe* was spotted on the surface on 25 April and was attacked by helicopters from HMS *Plymouth*, HMS *Brilliant*, and HMS *Endurance*. The badly damaged *Santa Fe* was abandoned by its crew at King Edward Point. HMS *Antrim* and HMS *Plymouth* maneuvered to undertake shore battery of the Argentine garrison in Grytviken Harbor, at which point the Argentineans surrendered their forces.

Argentina responded to the arrival of the British battle group by deploying two flotillas. The northern flotilla was centered on the aircraft carrier ARA *Veinticinco De Mayo*, which was a former RN vessel, similar in construction and vintage to the British flagship HMS *Hermes* and was escorted by two British built Type 42 destroyers ARA *Hercules* ARA *Santisima Trinidad*. As the northern flotilla approached the Falkland Islands it was being screened by RN SSNs *Splendid* and *Spartan*, while HMS *Conqueror* re-tasked to shadow the southern flotilla: ARA cruiser *Belgrano* and two escort destroyers, ARA *Piedra Buena* and ARA *Bouchard*. Formerly USN vessels, the southern flotilla was equipped with French Exocet anti-shipping cruise missiles. Woodward located to the east of the Falklands onboard the carrier HMS *Hermes*, and concluded that although the Argentinean vessels to the north remained outside of the MEZ, the carrier remained inside the maximum combat radius of its Douglas A-4 Skyhawk aircraft; he was also concerned that the carrier might be capable of launching Exocet equipped

Super-Etandard aircraft. Woodward expected a pincer attack, in which the ARA *Veinticinco De Mayo* would launch its aircraft against the battle group, while the ARA *Belgrano* came into range from the south and engaged carriers' HMS *Hermes* and *Invincible* with its anti-shipping cruise missiles. By 1 May, contact between CINC Fleet in London and the northern screen of SSNs *Splendid* and *Spartan* was lost, and unbeknownst to Woodward, freak weather conditions affecting the deck of the *Veinticinco De Mayo* made it impossible to launch aircraft.⁵² Woodward was mindful of the need to commence a diversionary shore battery off Port Stanley that next day and also received an intercepted signal from Lombardo ordering all ARA vessels to seek out the British task force and launch a 'massive attack'⁵³ the following day. When SSN HMS *Conqueror* subsequently monitored the ARA *Belgrano* changing course, it was feared that the SSN would not be able to monitor the cruiser as it traversed the shallow waters of the Burdwood Bank, situated to the south of the Falkland Islands. Having received authorization from London to attack, HMS *Conqueror* torpedoed and sank ARA *Belgrano*, leading to the single greatest toll of the conflict when 323 of its crew perished. The attack punctuated British public discussion on the conduct of the conflict, particularly by the RN whose tactics were much less well understood than those of the other Services. Beyond the direct issue of the *Belgrano* being outside of the MEZ, questions were raised about Woodward's role in having RoE changed to permit an attack to proceed. Woodward later revealed his frustration that the Task Force's submarines remained under control of CinC Fleet in the UK, despite Woodward himself having had been 'teacher' of the RN 'perisher' course and having personally selecting all of the current submarine commanders. Such was his belief in his understanding of the commanders' personalities and their likely response to pressure, he cut across the parallel chain of command and in doing so exceeded his authority by signaling H.M.S *Conqueror* an order to attack the

Belgrano. As Woodward had planned, the signal was channeled through CinC Fleet but was intercepted and cancelled, but it did prompt the signal being passed through to the PM who gave the order to amend the RoE and attack. In his memoir, Woodward defended his actions by arguing that he was facing a pincer movement from 2 flotilla of the Argentine Navy, and did not feel that he had time to route the request through normal channels.⁵⁴ Following the sinking of the *Belgrano*, ARA *Veinticinco De Mayo*, unable to launch a counterattack, returned to port in Argentina and transferred its aircraft ashore.⁵⁵ From this point onwards, no Argentinean surface vessel put to sea.

Control of the sea was not fully established on 2 May because Woodward suspected that Argentinean submarines continued to patrol the Falklands. Woodward himself a former submariner, issued orders that ships were to zigzag constantly as possible contacts were investigated, adding further pressure to his campaign schedule. Tasks such as naval gunfire support were put on hold as possible contacts were prosecuted, and this delayed the amphibious landing for one day.⁵⁶ In fact, aside from the *Santa Fe*, only the SSK ARA *San Luis* had put to sea and although the latter encountered two British vessels, torpedo firing system malfunctions on both occasions prevented an attack.⁵⁷ In spite of the *San Luis*' technical issues, a single submarine had occupied a disproportionate number of task force assets and delayed the schedule of the overall campaign.

In response to the sinking of the ARA *Belgrano*, on 4 May HMS *Sheffield* was attacked and sunk by Exocet missile. The *Sheffield*, a Type 42 guided missile destroyer, had been acting as one of three outer radar picket ships; use of the ship's own satellite communication system had conflicted with the ship's air surveillance radar, blinding it to an incoming attack, and an

error in communication with the other picket ships meant that their warnings were not acted upon.

To maintain the campaign schedule Sea Harrier aircraft attacked ground targets, intercepted Argentine air attacks and conducted ad-hoc airborne early warning tasks for the fleet. On 14 May, the Special Air Service conducted raids on West Falkland including an attack on Port Howard and nearby Pebble Island, destroying all Argentine Pucara ground-attack aircraft and effectively separating Argentinean lines of communication to Port Stanley.

On 21 May, the cumulative effects of the SAS raids, Sea Harrier activity and naval shore battery combined with low cloud and calm waters, facilitated an amphibious landing at San Carlos in Falkland Sound. San Carlos is situated inside the northern mouth of the Sound, sheltered by Fanning Head to the east and Mt. Maria adjacent on the West Falkland. To protect the amphibious force, Type 42 destroyers equipped with Sea Dart medium range missiles deployed beyond the northern entrance to the Sound to act as outer radar pickets, with their air surveillance radars focused on the Argentinean mainland. Type 22 frigates equipped with short-range Sea Wolf missiles accompanied the amphibious landing force into the confined waters of the Sound, while the two carriers remained back 50 miles to launch combat air patrols. One headline erroneously accused Woodward of being ‘coward’ who should have been ‘awarded the South Africa Star having positioned the flagship so far east of the action.’⁵⁸

At the landing site at San Carlos on East Falkland, a 5 by 2 mile control zone was established that extended to an altitude of 10,000ft. Within the box, only rotary wing aircraft were permitted and any fixed wing aircraft could be engaged. Any Argentine fixed wing aircraft was to be identified by the outer radar pickets and engaged by Sea Dart, those that broke through the picket and into the Sound were to be engaged by Sea Wolf from the Type 22 frigates. Finally,

shore-based Stinger and Rapier were to engage targets in and around the ships of the battle group. Any aircraft that emerged outside of the box was be engaged by Sea Harrier.

Argentina launched in excess of 330 Dagger and A-4 Skyhawk sorties against the amphibious force in San Carlos and repeated waves of audacious Argentine air attacks would see their aircraft break through the radar pickets and engage the fleet at such low altitudes that there was insufficient time for ordnance dropped from aircraft to fuse. Nevertheless on 21 May, frigate HMS *Ardent* was hit by a bomb that exploded during an attempt to diffuse it, on 23 May, frigate HMS *Antelope* was sunk following bombing and on 25 May, HMS *Coventry* was bombed and sank. Additionally, the RMS *Atlantic Conveyor*, mistaken for carrier HMS *Illustrious*, was attacked by Exocet leading to the loss of crew and valuable war materiel. Three quarters of the naval vessels operating in the Sound were hit with bombs, but many did not detonate. By 26 May the beachhead was secured with 5,000 troops having landed to recapture the Islands from 9,000 Argentinean soldiers.

Conflict Termination and Fortress Falklands: The unconditional surrender of Argentinean forces, on the 14 June, came at high cost and left the UK government averse to further proposals for negotiation. The FCO emphasized to ministers, the need to ensure that its subsequent diplomatic activity in Latin America did not cut across US relations with the OAS; ministers in the Cabinet were even more cautious. Nott cautioned Thatcher on post war policy for Latin America that there were ‘...too many factors which make for instability. Society is too stratified, church is too strong, and tensions between poverty and wealth are likely to grow as immigration of the poor into towns grows.’⁵⁹ Thatcher concluded that, for the time being British diplomatic indifference to the region was likely to be less of an embarrassment for the US.⁶⁰

The cost of replacing equipment lost and materiel consumed during the conflict was £1.8Billion; 25 of the 27 ships supporting the amphibious landings had been attacked and 15 had subsequently been lost or suffered major damage.⁶¹ Campaign losses constituted 25% of the total RN frigate/destroyer fleet and this necessarily placed an emphasis on airpower to defend the Islands against counterattack. Once the construction of a new airfield, air defense fleet, and a garrison; supported by air-bridge to the UK had been completed, expenditure rose to £3.8Bn by 1988 and the running costs of £75M persist today, making defense spending on Falkland Islanders in 2012 £37,500/ \$61,300 *per capita per annum*, 70 times that of citizens in mainland UK.⁶²

The full extent of US support to the UK has not yet been fully disclosed. What is certain is the value to the task force of access to Wide-awake Airfield on Ascension Island.⁶³ However, the UK government decided that it cannot assume future US support; in 2011, UK Defense Minister Phillip Hammond, advised Parliament that the UK must be ‘prepared and capable’ to defend the islands without the help of other nations. In 2015, the UK will complete construction of a civilian airfield on the island of St. Helena, part of the same British Overseas Territory as Ascension Island. The runway at St. Helena will be capable of operating C-17 aircraft that, alongside Typhoon fighter-bombers, could reinforce the Falklands garrison in response to increased tension.

Lessons Identified: The economic crises of the 1960s and 1970s had challenged successive governments to feel their way forward, albeit they were largely unable to anticipate or interpret events. The UK never successfully reappraised its strategy or its objectives, and in its failure to do so London whittled away its ability to influence events and shape the negotiating environment

with Argentina. Once Operation ROSARIO had begun, what had been intended as a nudge to diplomacy delivered by a regiment of Argentinean Marines quickly became an occupation of the Islands by a re-enforced infantry division. As the crisis and scale of Operation ROSARIO rapidly escalated, the more probable it became that the outcome would be determined by decisions and compromises made in expectation of the original undertaking. Accordingly, Argentina lost the Falklands conflict during the 10 days in early April before the British submarines arrived in the South Atlantic because they failed to sufficiently re-supply the Islands by sea and decided against extending the runway at Port Stanley to facilitate large aircraft operations. Once the MEZ and blockade were imposed, opportunities to receive reinforcements and rally were removed.

In emphasizing the importance of the starting point in events, a number of corresponding recommendations, as they relate to modern navies, are presented.

1. US leadership was never consulted on the putative Anglo-French operation at Suez. Britain erroneously assumed US neutrality in 1956, and in 1982 Argentina assumed US neutrality when it acted. Critically, these assumptions emboldened the belligerents, presenting the US with a vicarious risk of being drawn into a conflict. Engagement between a major power and its allies must be frank and open; so as to ensure that decisive instruments of national power are not assumed, and leveraged inadvisably.
2. US Secretary of State, General Alexander Haig, had great difficulty in negotiating for peace and securing agreement with the Argentine military Junta, but the problem lay in the construct of Argentine leadership. In practise, he found that the Junta, as a committee of limited agreement, was seldom able to identify their minimum collective aspirations and agree them; moreover, in Haig's case, no one of them was invested with the power to

make concessions. Cost Mendez confirmed to Haig that the Junta was ‘an oligarchy in which anyone could say ‘no’ or they all could say ‘no’. Costa Mendez attributed the failure of diplomacy to the structural limitations of negotiating with committees.

3. The deployment of a SSN constituted a tripwire strategy of deterrent. When submerged, a SSN provides no gradual escalation of deterrence and their intentions cannot be assessed, thus unintentionally precipitating the events intended to be deterred. Once past the threshold of war, SSN warfighting capability is invaluable.
4. All British submarines remained under the direct control of CINC Fleet at Northwood, rather than Woodward as the Task Force commander. HMS *Conqueror* was acting as the southern screen for the Task Force when Woodward came under threat from the ARA *Belgrano*, yet Woodward was expected to refrain from exercising OPCON and formally request support through Northwood HQ in London; at the expense of time, flexibility and tactical advantage. The Task Force battle group’s Unity of Command was compromised by the decision not to delegate OPCON of the submarines to the Task Force commander. Moreover, during the deterrent stage of a naval deployment, the doctrinal practise of delegating OPCON of submarines to the task force commander would better facilitate interpretation of submarine disposition and intentions; potentially reducing the likelihood of pushing past the threshold of war.
5. For reasons of diplomacy and international law, sea blockades are usually preceded by Maritime Exclusion Zones (MEZ) and patrolled by submarines. Submarines execute control of the sea with reference to hydrographic and tactical considerations that are distinct from surface forces. These considerations were of particular concern as HMS *Conqueror* risked losing the ARA *Belgrano* when it transited the Burdwood Bank. To

permit the attack, the Rules of Engagement required amendment creating much controversy. In addition to separate RoE for MEZ and blockade operations, separate RoE should be issued for submarine and surface force operations, even if OPCON is centered on the task force commander.

6. The land campaign had to be completed before the onset of the Antarctic winter. This drove urgency, since Woodward needed to draw out the ARA and its air assets, remove them as a threat to gain control of the sea and air superiority. Completing the campaign on schedule discounted a strategy of attrition and necessitating decisive confrontation and a disproportionate level of risk to the ships of the battle group. Joint Force commanders must assume the vicarious risks of their component Services, with the extent to which naval forces must be exposed to risk so as to ensure the viability of subsequent ground operations being an exceptionally difficult calculation. Losses will likely exceed estimates, placing a premium on resilient military/political objectives.
7. British activity in the UN centered on achieving agreement on Resolution 502, the immediate withdrawal of the Argentinean forces from the Falkland Islands. Lord Lewin, Chief of the Naval Staff, composed military objectives from examination of the draft Resolution 502 and had them accepted by the War Cabinet; in essence UK military objectives were explicitly in accord with London's political objectives, which were aligned with an agreed UN resolution that invoked Article 51 rights to self-defense. The objectives were set early, coherent and followed without review until they were achieved.

Relevance to Current Events: In the context of the US strategic pivot to Asia, allies with modern navies will deploy, train and patrol in disputed waters, especially as China asserts itself. As the de facto guarantor of security to Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, the US must ensure that

its own intentions and its ‘minimum line’ is understood by its allies, so that they are not emboldened to act in the event of provocation. Negotiations to restore unrestricted access to contested waters will necessarily involve a Chinese leadership that is increasingly institutionalized through the Politburo Standing Committee and the Central Military Commission. Should negotiations be outpaced by events and escalation occurs, the potential deployment of SSN to the disputed region should be undertaken under the OPCON of a deterrent surface task force commander so that the disposition and intentions of all elements of that force can be discerned, with the aim of avoiding the threshold of armed conflict. To subsequently achieve and sustain unified action will require military objectives explicitly in accord with the national and transnational political objectives. During the Falklands crisis, the key to achieving unified action was the invoking of UN Article 51, yet in the disputed territories of the South China Seas, this would be complicated by a likely Chinese veto. If these challenges are contemplated and addressed in advance of provocation, it may be possible to avoid military conflict, or if conflict becomes inevitable, to influence the rate at which events escalate.

Conclusion: Following the announcement of the deployment of a Royal Navy SSN to intervene on South Georgia, the Argentinean military junta felt compelled to accelerate the plan to invade the Falkland Islands; yet once ashore, they failed to capitalize on their gains. The impending onset of the Antarctic winter drove urgency into the British task force’s plans to draw out the Argentinean Navy & its air assets and remove them as a threat. The resulting schedule necessitated decisive confrontation and in ensuring the viability of ground operations, Woodward had to assume a disproportionate level of risk to the ships of the battle group. Each successful Argentine attack eliminated vessels from the warfighting, attracting casualty rates that accrued

faster than those of subsequent ground operations. Nevertheless the campaign's objectives were set early, they were coherent with the political objectives and fought under UN Article 51's right to self-defense. When casualties exceeded estimates, the campaign was resilient to scrutiny; ensuring minimal political interference until the military objectives were achieved.

If Britain had failed to re-appraise its strategy prior to the war, the Junta failed to re-appraise their strategy and capitalize on their early gains in April, 1982; the consequences were militarily decisive for Britain.



End Notes

¹ Freedman, Lawrence, ‘*Origins of the Falklands War.*’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 209.

² On October 3rd 1985, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands became a separate British Overseas Territory.

³ Freedman, Lawrence, ‘*Origins of the Falklands War.*’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 2.

⁴ Uninterrupted and undisturbed acquisition & possession of a territory that was previously under another state’s occupation or sovereignty.

⁵ The United Nations *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, (1960).

⁶ Charlton, Michael. ‘*Little Platoon: Diplomacy in the Falkland Islands Dispute.*’ Blackwell, London. (1989). 13.

⁷ Freedman, Lawrence, ‘*Origins of the Falklands War.*’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 19.

⁸ *Ibid.* 49.

⁹ *Ibid.* 21

¹⁰ Admiral Harry Train II cites more mercurial reasons underpinning the resistance of the absentee landowners in his 1988 paper (see below) but Lawrence Freedman later confers with Train in his own Official History published in 2005; the latter document stands in this instance.

¹¹ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/218/28/IMG/NR021828.pdf?OpenElement>. Accessed 06 Dec 2013.

¹² Freedman, Lawrence, ‘*Origins of the Falklands War.*’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 26.

¹³ *Proceedings of the House of Commons Hansard* (12th Dec 1968). Columns 608-614.

¹⁴ Charlton, Michael. ‘*Little Platoon: Diplomacy in the Falkland Islands Dispute.*’ Blackwell, London. (1989). 26.

¹⁵ Barker, P F and Griffiths, D H. ‘*The evolution of the Scotia Ridge and Scotia Sea.*’ Royal Society (1974) 271

¹⁶ Carrington, Peter. ‘*Reflecting on Things Past: The Memoirs of Lord Carrington*’. Collins, London. (1988.) 365.

¹⁷ Freedman, Lawrence, ‘*Origins of the Falklands War.*’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 85.

¹⁹ Charlton, Michael ‘*Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute*’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989.) 116

²⁰ *Ibid.* 62.

²¹ Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT) from 1978-82 and later undertook a US classified investigation into the Falklands conflict.

²² Charlton, Michael ‘*Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute*’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989.) 116.

²³ *Ibid.* 142.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 143.

²⁵ Train, Harry. ‘*An Analysis of the Falkland Island Campaign.*’ US Naval War College Review Winter (1988) 37.

²⁶ Charlton, Michael ‘*Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute*’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989) 141.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 145.

²⁸ Freedman, Lawrence, ‘*Origins of the Falklands War.*’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 20.

²⁹ Kirkpatrick, Jeane, ‘*Dictatorships and Double Standards*’ Commentary Magazine Vol. 68, No. 5, USA 34.

³⁰ Carrington, Peter. ‘*Reflecting on Things Past: The Memoirs of Lord Carrington*’. Collins, London. (1988.) 360.

³¹ Clark, Tom & Dilnot, Andrew. ‘*Long-Term Trends in British Taxation and Spending.*’ Briefing Note 25. Institute for Fiscal Studies, London. (2002) 2.

³² Freedman, Lawrence, ‘*Origins of the Falklands War.*’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 92.

³³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/61>. Accessed 6th Dec 2013

³⁴ Library of the House of Commons. ‘*Standard Note/1A/5714.*’ London. (2010) 8.

³⁵ Charlton, Michael ‘*Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute*’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989.) 109.

³⁶ Freedman, Lawrence, ‘*Origins of the Falklands War.*’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 138.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 181.

³⁸ Charlton, Michael ‘*Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute*’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989.) 110.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 120.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 116.

⁴¹ Train, Harry. ‘An Analysis of the Falkland Island Campaign.’ US Naval War College Review Winter (1988) 36.

⁴² Charlton, Michael ‘Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989.) 119.

⁴³ Train, Harry. ‘An Analysis of the Falkland Island Campaign.’ US Naval War College Review Winter (1988) 37.

⁴⁴ Charlton, Michael ‘Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989.) 162.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 201.

⁴⁶ <http://fc95d419f4478b3b6e5f3f71d0fe2b653c4f00f32175760e96e7.r87.cf1.rackcdn.com/2453BA4811704D8CBBCE8AD9CEE06024.pdf> Accessed 6th Dec 2013. Accessed 6th Dec 2013. Declassified Minutes of the US NSC meeting held in the White House, 30th April, 1982.

⁴⁷ Deputy Director of the CIA who attended US NSC on 30th April, 1982.

⁴⁸ Charlton, Michael ‘Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989) 174.

⁴⁹ Woodward, Sandy. *One Hundred Days: Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*. Naval Institute Press, US. (2012) 72.

⁵⁰ Zellem, Edward. ‘Clausewitz and Sea Power: Lessons of the Falkland Islands War. ACSC Dissertation (1999) 17.

⁵¹ Woodward, Sandy. ‘One Hundred Days: Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander.’ Naval Institute Press, US. (2012) 124.

⁵² *Ibid.* 167.

⁵³ Charlton, Michael ‘Little Platoon: Diplomacy and the Falklands Dispute’. Blackwell, Oxford. (1989) 215.

⁵⁴ Woodward, Sandy. *One Hundred Days: Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*. Naval Institute Press, US. (2012). 149.

⁵⁵ Freedman, Lawrence, ‘War and Diplomacy.’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 434.

⁵⁶ Harper, Steven. ‘Submarine Operations during the Falkland’s War.’ US NWC Dissertation. (1994.) 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Woodward, Sandy. *One Hundred Days: Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*. Naval Institute Press. (2012). xviii.

⁵⁹ Freedman, Lawrence, ‘War and Diplomacy.’ Routledge Press, London. (2005) 691.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 672

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Ascension is a satellite island of the British Overseas Territory of St Helena, the airfield had been reopened in 1982 and was operated by the USAF.

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